



**DRAFT HOMELESSNESS STRATEGY
AND ACTION PLAN
NOVEMBER 2019**

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Executive Summary



Internationally, there is a growing body of literature and evidence suggesting that Local Governments have an important role in working towards the long term solutions of the issue of homelessness; and provide leadership and support to the community services sector locally. This approach is in line with decisions made by the Council of Australian Government (COAG) which have committed all tiers of government to work towards a reduction in homelessness.

Liverpool City Council (Council) seeks to continue and build upon its commitments to social justice, social sustainability and social inclusion during a time of unprecedented growth and development experienced by our city. Council recognises that homelessness is a complex issue influenced by multiple structural and personal drivers. Liverpool has a higher portion of the population who experience drivers that create pathways into homelessness when compared with the State average. This exacerbates Council's duty to act on the issue.

The Homelessness Strategy and Action Plan is the foundation of Council's commitment to evidence based initiatives that strive to support some of the most vulnerable members of our community. The Strategy aims to maximise pathways out of homelessness and associated costs to health, safety and well-being, while responding to immediate and pressing needs of those members of our community experiencing homelessness.

The Homelessness Strategy and Action Plan provides a mechanism to respond to the impacts of homelessness in the Liverpool Local Government Area (LGA) more effectively, work towards prevention initiatives, and collaborate with the community services sector on practical solutions locally to improve health and access to much needed services by our most disadvantaged and marginalised members of the community, the people who are homeless.

INTRODUCTION

Recent evidence based guidance and best practice examples prove that Local Government has a key role to play. Effective targeting of policies and services for reducing homelessness requires transparent, consistent, repeatable and measurable initiatives. There are many dimensions to homelessness, and different initiatives are needed to be adopted for different purposes. Liverpool City Council, through its Homelessness Strategy and Action Plan will contribute in its convening role to progressive and sustainable solutions to homelessness.

Homelessness is an issue that affects all societies, particularly cities with high populations and dense infrastructure (Macready, 2012). Whether short or long term, homelessness is one of the most severe forms of disadvantage and social exclusion that a person can experience. Homelessness results in significant social and economic costs not just to individuals and their families, but also to communities and the nation as a whole. The issue of homelessness is a complex problem which have many and varied causes. Domestic violence, a shortage of affordable housing, unemployment, mental illness, family breakdown and drug and alcohol abuse and other variables are all recognised factors contributing to the homelessness issue in Australia.

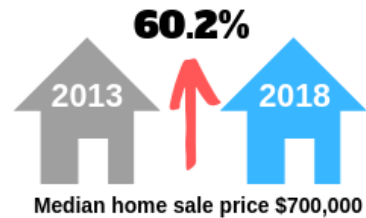
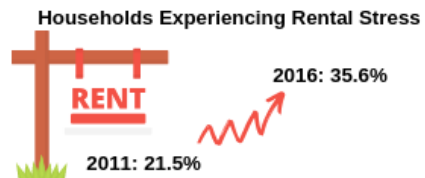
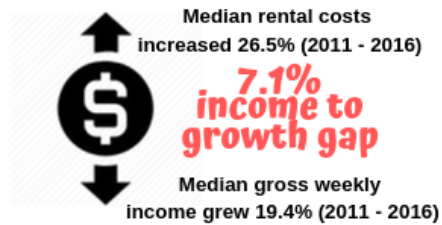
According to new data from the 2016 Census of Population and Housing, the rate of homelessness in Australia has increased by 4.6 per cent over the last five years. The latest estimates reveal more than 116,000 people were experiencing homelessness in Australia on Census night, representing 50 homeless persons for every 10,000 people. This is a high proportion considering Australia ranks number 27 in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) list. Within the local context, the City of Liverpool has an estimated homeless population of 1,058 as of 2016 which represents an increase of 36% since 2011. The magnitude of the issue and the implications it has on a broader scale of variables such as increased pressures and expenditures on the healthcare, criminal justice system and others indicate that the matter would be best addressed if accountability among all three tiers of government is shared.

Similar to other areas, homelessness in Liverpool is a result of a multitude of factors, some of which are financial and housing stress, mental or physical illness, family violence, unsupported institutional release and often a combination of factors. Although housing stress and continuously decreasing living affordability could be seen as the primary cause, the complex nature of factors that lead to homelessness requires a multi-agency approach. Commitment

to collaboration and coordination across government agencies and the human services sector is crucial. Within this context, Liverpool City Council should use its convening role as the facilitator of the solutions to homelessness, not the provider.

VULNERABILITY INDICATORS FOR LIVERPOOL

Vulnerability Indicators



WHY A HOMELESSNESS STRATEGY

Australia is at a critical juncture in its approach to supporting some of its most vulnerable people. How a nation chooses to provide housing and support to those in need, underpins its commitment to the principles of social justice, safety and security of its people, and is a measure of its contract to care for all. Council's Social Justice Policy and various social planning policies and strategies are endorsed to provide safety and care to the Liverpool residents.

Raising public awareness and educating the community on the issue of homelessness is one of the few very important steps local councils could take. This would help to foster a sense of community and increase social cohesion as well as protecting the rights and living conditions of homeless people. Council's Social Justice Policy does recognise housing as a human right. This strategy is a way to build on and communicate these concepts directly with the public and government and non-government partner agencies.

One of the biggest roadblocks is the overall lack of understanding of the homelessness topic, namely the direct and indirect affects of housing and development policies. This means the understanding of the available options for increasing the supply through not only regulatory controls but also through partnerships is also inadequate. Another matter is poor coordination and collaboration among agencies. Approximately 67% of local government respondents to a national survey on the topic stated that they did not pursue non-government (NGO) partnerships, where 60% did not pursue partnerships with state and commonwealth housing providers.

The emerging trend toward considering homelessness primarily an issue of housing, with a proposition of housing first model, opens up the question of the role of local government and homelessness. Recently, there has been increasing international pressure for local governments to play a more substantial role in housing through their planning and service delivery functions. Local government planning powers enable councils to 'facilitate the provision of different housing types, opportunities for economic and community activities, the range of local services, the location of housing in relation to the location of services and employment opportunities and the ease with which other sectors can provide services and facilities in the broadest sense (Purdon, 1992 p.56).

DEVELOPING THIS STRATEGY

The Liverpool Homelessness Strategy and Action Plan underpins Council's commitment to human rights and advocating for its most vulnerable members of the community, with the objective to reduce the impact of homelessness on individuals and the community.

Building on the learnings from the previous Liverpool Homelessness Strategy 2015-2017, this strategy has been developed with an extensive literature review of emerging paradigms in the field and analysis of best practice examples on the national and international levels. Local partnerships and initiatives such as the Liverpool-Fairfield Homelessness Interagency and the Liverpool Community Kitchen and Hub were examined to understand challenges, gaps in service delivery, opportunities for improvement and collaborative approaches. Further, key internal and external stakeholders were consulted on developing a plan of action relevant to the homelessness experience in Liverpool and South West Sydney.

POLICY FRAMEWORK

This Strategy is informed by, and aligned to, international, national, state and regional policies, and Council's Community Strategic Plan (CSP), Our Home, Liverpool 2027.

International Context

The international response to homelessness is guided by the United Nations covenants to which Australia is a signatory. The Strategy makes direct reference to rights under Articles 11 and 25:

United Nations Convention on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1966) Article 11

The States Parties to the present Covenant recognise the right of everyone to an adequate standard of living for himself and his family, including adequate food, clothing and housing, and to the continuous improvement of living conditions. The States Parties will take appropriate steps to ensure the realisation of this right, recognizing to this effect the essential importance of international cooperation based on free consent.

Universal Declaration on Human Rights (1948) Article 25

Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control.

National Context

In Australia, government programs to stimulate social and affordable housing supply combined with support services claim to have achieved positive results. Following the release of 'The Road Home: A National Approach to Reducing Homelessness' in 2008, the Federal Government introduced a number of programs. The 2008 White Paper Strategy outlines the national approach to reducing homelessness and establishes targets to halve homelessness by 2020 and offer supported accommodation to all rough sleepers who need it. The two key programs introduced under the strategy were the National Affordable Housing Agreement (NAHA) and the National Partnership on Social Housing (NPSH). These programs added strategies for access to social housing, assistance to people in the private rental market, support and accommodation for people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness, and assistance to first home buyers. Part of this commitment has been to fund frontline services focusing on women and children experiencing domestic violence, and homeless youth under 18 years of age.

NSW Context

The NSW Homelessness Strategy sets out the NSW Government's plan to prevent and improve the ways government respond to homelessness. It is referred to as 'a framework for action that will enable government agencies, the non-government sector, and the community to collaborate and act to reduce the impact of homelessness on individuals, and improve outcomes for people and families.' It outlines the shared responsibility among key state government agencies for preventing homelessness and increasing access to services for people experiencing or at risk of homelessness.

The NSW Government's Homelessness Strategy 2018-2023 acknowledges the importance of the Housing First model in NSW. The Strategy refers to the complex nature of homelessness and the need for a holistic response to break the cycle of disadvantage. Priorities this Strategy seeks to address include a combination of existing and new initiatives. The successes of these measures are dependent on working closely with external stakeholders, as well as applying a holistic approach internally.

THE LOCAL CONTEXT

Federal and State Governments hold the statutory responsibility to allocate funds and deliver services to people who are at risk of or are experiencing homelessness. For such a multi-faceted issue, clarity around the roles and responsibilities are paramount for effective outcomes at the local level.

The research into the role of local government identified that the majority of councils in Australia play a relatively minor role in mitigating the impacts of homelessness and fewer councils claim a role in preventing homelessness. Currently an overwhelming majority of councils in Australia do not have a formal homelessness policy and or strategy. In many cases there are certain regulations and laws that are designed to have an effect on the issue although few councils actively enforce these regulations.

A research by the University of Adelaide to examine the role of local government and homelessness, acknowledges that local government's role in town planning responsibilities and zoning policies mean that local governments have a pivotal influence on the housing sector and other variables that have an effect on homelessness.

Local government has many responsibilities with respect to the provision of housing – land use planning, affordable housing targets, the regulation of boarding houses in some places, and the management of urban spaces. This trend to reconceptualising homelessness and repositioning it within public policy domains, has had significant impacts on local government's engagement with homelessness. Increasing the supply of affordable and diverse housing types are found to be the effective step local governments could take to create tangible outcomes and improvements of the situation.

Other mechanisms local governments can do to create a positive impact on homelessness is through creation of protocols that standardise and increase the outcomes for homeless population such as access to and use of public open space, regulation of affordable housing and or boarding houses and the co-ordination of services. Further, local governments, due to their closeness to the community and their multifunctional organisational structure, have the ability to plan and coordinate a range of local services within the social planning functions.

Relevant to Liverpool, Council acknowledges that a variety of homes will be needed to cater for a diverse population with different needs and incomes. Liverpool requires housing that is suitable for young families, larger size homes to cater for multi-generational families within a culturally diverse context, more affordable dwellings, and housing for downsizers and those who want to age in place. Council supports an

increase in affordable rental housing for the community, with the LGA suffering from one of the highest rates of rental stress in the country.

IMPLEMENTATION FRAMEWORK

Recent evidence based guidance and best practice examples prove that local government has a key role in responding to the needs of homeless people. Effective targeting of policies and services to reduce homelessness require transparent, consistent and repeatable initiatives. There are many dimensions to homelessness, and different initiatives are needed to be adopted for different purposes. Council, through its Homelessness Strategy and Action Plan will contribute in its convening role for progressive and sustainable solutions to reduce homelessness and ease its impacts on people living in homelessness environment.

The Strategy takes into consideration the international, national, and local context of homelessness. It considers the extent of the issue and local drivers, and provides directions and guidance based on best practice models, and apply measures to improve outcomes for those impacted by homelessness.

- Council will use its planning powers, advocacy and social planning role to have consistent controls and policy settings for the delivery of appropriate housing developments and service provision. This can be achieved through encouraging diverse housing options in the LGA through development controls, building approval processes, subdivision controls and minimum affordable housing requirements;
- Raising awareness amongst internal and external stakeholders and the general population about the nature, causes and consequences of homelessness;
- Advocating on behalf of vulnerable groups in the community and actively advocate reversing the public nuisance perception.
- Facilitating networks and building connections and capacity across various government and non-government agencies working with people at risk of or experiencing homelessness;
- Assessing community needs and identifying gaps in service provision;
- Increasing the function of Local government as place-makers and public space managers;
- Promoting inclusive access to public space and community facilities; and
- Monitoring the implementation of planning objectives, and if necessary, intervening where possible

Priority Areas

Key priorities area Council will strive to address are:

- Advocate for a Housing First Approach – the Right to Housing;
- Improve community perceptions of homelessness;
- Support and advocacy for vulnerable and disadvantaged groups;
- Support local collaborations and service coordination;
- Support agencies who provide essential service such as food, shower and clothing;
and
- Public space management.

The four-year Strategy is accompanied by an Action Plan that will be evaluated and reported on in consultation with internal and external stakeholders on annual basis.

ACTION PLAN

Priority 1: Advocate for a 'Housing First' approach

Action	Responsibility of	Implementation Timeframe
Map current social housing, community housing and affordable housing supply locally.	Community Development and Planning	2020-2021
Undertake a forecast and gap analysis of housing stock with key government and non-government agencies.	Community Development and Planning	2020-2021
Investigate a localised housing first approach with key partner agencies, internal staff, and relevant government departments.	Liverpool/ Fairfield Homelessness Interagency	2020-2021
Explore the increase of affordable housing stock in Liverpool through Council's endorsed mechanisms and advocacy to business leaders and housing sector.	Development Assessment Strategic Planning and Transport Community Development and Planning City Property	Ongoing
Investigate delivery of affordable housing on Council owned land.	Strategic Planning and Transport City Property	Ongoing

Priority 2: Support local partnerships and service coordination

Action	Responsibility of	Implementation Timeframe
Develop a training program for frontline Council staff to increase awareness and skills when working and engaging with homelessness people.	Community Development and Planning	2020-2021

Co-convene the Fairfield/ Liverpool Homelessness Interagency to ensure a collaborative approach to resource planning and service delivery.	Community Development and Planning	Ongoing
Support the State Government agencies to report, respond and manage complex homeless cases in a timely manner.	Community Development and Planning	Ongoing
Support local agencies to develop and maintain a database on needs and services, including accommodation supply.	Community Development and Planning	2020-2022

Priority 3: Improving community perceptions of homelessness

Action	Responsibility of	Implementation Timeframe
Inform and update the community about local homelessness programs, events, and initiatives to raise awareness and increase participation.	Community Development and Planning Communications	Ongoing
Explore local media opportunities and good news stories with partner agencies.	Fairfield/ Liverpool Homelessness Interagency	Ongoing
Support awareness raising initiatives including training, homelessness and anti-poverty week events.	Community Development and Planning	Ongoing
Consult and conduct case studies with homeless people to inform decision making, priority setting and service delivery.	Fairfield/ Liverpool Homelessness Interagency	Ongoing
Co-convene local initiatives such as Night Under the Stars to raise funds and awareness.	Fairfield/ Liverpool Homelessness Interagency	Annually

Priority 4: Support agencies that provide essential service such as food, shower and clothing

Action	Responsibility of	Implementation Timeframe
Support the Liverpool Community Kitchen and Hub Strategic Committee and other charities with continuation of essential wrap-around services and outreach programs.	Community Development and Planning	Ongoing
Develop and maintain a database of state and local agencies who work directly and indirectly with homeless population.	Fairfield/ Liverpool Homelessness Interagency	2020-2021
Support community and accommodation services to access funding and resources for homelessness initiatives.	Community Development and Planning	Ongoing
Promote access to resources and services through online, website, and networks to those in need.	Community Development and Planning External Partners	Ongoing

Priority 5: Public Space Management

Action	Responsibility of	Implementation Timeframe
Streamline referral and case management pathways with the State Government's Assertive Outreach Program to ensure effective and timely response locally.	Community Development and Planning	2020-2021
Improve in-house procedures to manage reporting and referral pathways for people sleeping rough in public places and Council owned	Customer Experience Community Development and Planning	Ongoing

facilities, with the safety and wellbeing of rough sleepers and general public as a priority.	Community Standards City Property	
Review and update the Rough Sleeper Protocol in consultation with partner agencies.	Community Development and Planning	2020-2021
Develop a fact sheet for internal and external stakeholders, including the public, on reporting and support mechanisms.	Community Development and Planning	2019-2020
Investigate the provision of essential facilities such as showers and laundry for rough sleepers.	Liverpool/ Fairfield Homelessness Interagency	2020-2021

Appendix 1

Charter of Rights for Homeless People

- Not blaming or punishing people for being homeless;
- Working with homeless people to address their homelessness;
- Ensuring that Council's plans, policies and procedures do not disadvantage homeless people;
- Addressing homelessness as part of wider objectives to establish a more inclusive city;
- Recognising homeless people's rights and responsibilities are the same as everyone else's;
- Recognising that homeless people may have an affiliation with certain public spaces;
- Recognising that homeless people have a right to be in public space without fear of harassment, as well as the responsibility not to infringe on others;
- Consulting on homeless people on decisions that affect them;
- Recognising that homeless people need to access infrastructure in public spaces to meet some of their basic needs; and
- Recognising that some Indigenous people have a preference for living and conducting social activities outdoors (Lawson 2002 quoted in Greenhalgh 2004b p. 29).

Appendix 2

Homelessness in Australia a Snapshot of Key Statistics

Many Australians experience events in their lives that may place them at risk of homelessness. It is estimated that around 44% of low-income households experience affordability issues due to rental stress (paying more than 30% of their gross income on rent), and around 1 in 4 women have experienced some form of domestic and family violence in their lifetime, putting them at risk of homelessness. Provided below are some social, economic and structural variables that impact the homelessness issue.

How has the housing landscape changed in Australia in the past few decades?

- Ownership remains the dominant form of housing but it is much less affordable, and now makes up a smaller percentage of households. Putting this fact in quantifiable terms, in 2014 there were almost 8.8 million households. Of these, 31% were owned outright compared to 42% two decades ago, 36% were owned with a mortgage (compared to 30%), 26% privately rented (compared to 18%).
- Real house prices have risen at a faster rate than incomes.
- A significant proportion of private renters are in the bottom 40% of the income scale, with 47% receiving some form of income support, and a fifth for whom income support is the primary income.
- In addition to the declining affordability of ownership, in the past decade the cost of renting has risen at twice the rate of wages and the proportion of total stock as social housing provision has fallen to less than 5%. At the same time, the number of people on social housing waiting lists have grown to more than 215,000.

In 2015-16, Specialist Homelessness Services delivered the following across Australia:

- 279,000 people were assisted by Specialist Homelessness Services. This is an increase of 23,000 people compared to 2014-15 (nine per cent growth over one year).
- 22 million days of support were delivered. This is an increase of 2 million days compared to 2014-15 (nine per cent growth over one year).
- Almost 7 million nights of accommodation were provided. This is an increase of 400,000 nights compared to 2014-15 (six per cent growth over one year).

- On any given day across Australia, 1,460 Specialist Homelessness Services was supporting nearly 57,000 clients. Over 9,900 of these clients were young people presenting alone with more than 15,500 children presenting with their families. Almost 9,800 clients reported having slept rough in the last month, a 13% increase when compared to 2014-15.

Reflection of the vulnerable population in Homelessness, in 2015-16:

- Six in ten clients were female
- One in four clients were Indigenous compared with just one in thirty-three in the general population
- Almost two in five clients sought assistance for domestic and family violence
- About one in ten clients had a disability and of these, over one third, or nearly 10,000 people, needed assistance with self-care, mobility and/or communication
- One in four clients, or 72,000 individuals receiving assistance from a Specialist Homelessness Service, were experiencing a current mental health issue
- 52% of young people presenting alone were homeless at the time they sought support
- 59 % or six in ten older clients lived alone prior to accessing Specialist Homelessness Services

Appendix 3

Housing First Model

In the past decade, a significant shift has begun to occur in efforts to address homelessness, with agencies and communities increasingly moving away from shelter and transitional housing strategies toward prevention and Housing First approaches, which seek to maintain households in housing whenever possible and rapidly re-house those for whom homelessness cannot be prevented. The Housing First approach encompasses a diverse range of programs; however, they are guided by a number of principles.

A growing body of research is documenting the effectiveness of the Housing First approach, particularly when used in working with homeless persons who have serious behavioural health and other disabilities. This research indicates that the approach is effective both at placing and retaining persons in permanent housing and at reducing the costs associated with these individuals within the healthcare and judicial systems.

Changing the culture in relation to the perception/understanding of the issue is vital for long term success and sustainable change. On that note, one desirable outcome of Housing First approaches that it aims for establishing a long term solution through addressing the societal causes leading to homelessness and also creating transitional models/pathways to provide opportunities for people to move along the housing continuum.

7.1 Housing First Principles

- Homelessness is first and foremost a housing problem and should be treated as such
- Housing is a right to which all are entitled – SJP – Housing as human right!
- People who are homeless or on the verge of homelessness should be returned to or stabilized in permanent housing as quickly as possible and connected to resources necessary to sustain that housing
- Issues that may have contributed to a household's homelessness can best be addressed once they are housed

7.2 Housing First programs typically aim to:

- Reduce the length of time that households spend homeless or prevent Homelessness for households at imminent risk;
- Increase the number of households who obtain permanent housing or the rate at which households obtain permanent housing;
- Increase the number of households who obtain needed supports to maintain their housing; and Increase the number of families stabilized in permanent housing over time.

7.3 Housing First Service Delivery Components

- *Emergency services* that address the immediate need for shelter or stabilization in current housing
- *Housing, Resource, and Support Services Assessment* which focuses on housing needs, preferences, and barriers; resource acquisition (e.g., entitlements); and identification of services needed to sustain housing
- *Housing placement assistance* including housing location and placement; financial assistance with housing costs (e.g., security deposit, first month's rent, move-in and utilities connection, short- or long-term housing subsidies); advocacy and assistance in addressing housing barriers (e.g., poor credit history or debt, prior eviction, criminal conviction)
- *Case management services* (frequently time-limited) specifically focused on maintaining permanent housing or the acquisition and sustainment of permanent housing

Examples of best practice in the field of homelessness

It is important to critically examine the notion of 'best' or 'good' practice because understandings of this concept differ and have implications for both policy and practice. Good practice describes the way things ought to be done or identifies another location where things are done in the best possible way (Greenhalgh, 2004 p.133). The process of identifying good practice involves defining what is 'best', developing a set of benchmarks or performance indicators and changing current practices to gradually include elements of good practice. This section further explores some of the factors that contribute to achieving better outcomes within the scope of local government duties in addressing Homelessness in addition to the guidance provided in Appendix 3.

Motivation for local government to address homelessness is constrained by the perception that housing is solely a State and Federal responsibility or the sense that housing policies are programs are 'imposed' upon them from 'above'. This notion is rapidly changing and emerging evidence suggests that provision of adequate and appropriate supply of housing stock across the continuum as explained in elsewhere in this document under Housing First Model is proven to be the most effective incentive to increase efficiency in the Homelessness sector.

There are also other factors that influence better outcomes in this emerging field of practice. This section intends to explain some of the major variables that create success in Homelessness preventing provisions. Starting with how size, design and location of the housing stock in regards to affordable and/or social housing is one of the major driving forces of success in this complex issue.

Size: Most of the existing supply of social and affordable housing is out of sync with the changing demographics of different localities. Recent data suggest that the demand for one or two bedroom dwellings outstrips the supply. Underutilization, overcrowding and other negative outcomes emerge from this.

Design: This factor is important relating to outcomes concerning concepts such as social inclusion, social justice and place making. Another very important issue related to the design choice is regarding people with specific needs. At June 2013 almost 40% of social housing tenants had a disability and there is a significant unmet need for suitable housing for this group. (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2014).

AHURI has calculated that by the time the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) is fully implemented in 2019, there will be an unmet need in affordable housing for 83,000 to 122,000 NDIS participants.

Location: Location of the housing facility is vital for its long term success. In this matter, outdated policies usually increase social exclusion by entrenching disadvantage in some locations. In New South Wales, 28% of social housing tenants are unemployed and 94% receive Centrelink as their primary income; yet in many areas of social housing, jobs are limited. (NSW parliament legislative) delivery of more affordable developments around key transit precincts and activity centres.

Achieving a Mixed Tenure: Mixed tenure prioritises the diversity of tenants and housing types within a new development. This diversity can be a mix of individuals or households on a range of income levels, from different cultural backgrounds and cultures and with a variety of occupations. A well-managed mixed tenure provision contributes to improving social cohesion in a community while also increases the financial viability of any development. As pointed out earlier in the document, there is no economic stimulus without social stimulus and housing sector is at the centre of this.

Conversely, issues have occurred in areas where there is a concentration of social housing without either the existence of a local industry and/or required social services to support the community. This kind of short sighted approach also reproduces the misinformation and stigma attached to social housing.

“Disadvantage is spatially concentrated so housing developments need to take these factors into account.”

Availability of the appropriate and adequate housing stock does not guarantee better outcomes on its own. In addition to the other aspects which contribute to delivering better outcomes in this field, there is a clear need to strengthen the support systems in place to provide holistic and integrated services focusing on other aspects of people’s lives such as education and/or pre-employment training, mental health, drug and alcohol problems, and/or domestic and family violence.

Appendix 5

Cost of homelessness and Social Return on Investment

The cost of homelessness to homeless persons, our community, and economy is enormous, and this cost increases the longer an individual remains homeless. The annual cost to the community of rough sleeping has been estimated as exceeding \$25,000 per person, while the cost of youth homelessness in Australia, in terms of additional health and criminal justice costs, has been calculated to be \$626 million per year.

Previous studies have consistently found that homelessness is the result of a number of complex problems, including discrimination, a chronic shortage of affordable and available rental housing, domestic and family violence, intergenerational poverty, long term unemployment, economic and social exclusion, and severe and persistent mental illness.

In addition, evidence in this field of study clearly shows the increased cost to government for trying to solve, rather than prevent homelessness. In numerical terms, the cost for government to provide health and justice services to the homeless men is 10 times, or 22,080\$, greater than that was observed for the population in general. Generally, homeless people are high users of government non-homelessness services (i.e. health, justice, welfare), with the mean costs of those services ranging from approximately 18K\$ to 44K\$ per client per year.

“There is no economic stimulus without social stimulus and the housing sector is at the center of this”

For many people on low-incomes housing options are limited to the small number of private rentals that are affordable and available to low-income owners and /or social housing for which there are long and growing waiting lists or unstable and inadequate accommodation amounting to homelessness.

Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute (AHURI) calculated that the shortfall in affordable and available private rentals for low-income earners was almost 400,000 properties, this figure is up from an earlier estimation of 225,000 properties in 2006. The overall situation is also worsening for households which are categorised in the bottom 40% of income earners and who currently are able to afford the private rental

system. Even though this cohort of households usually doesn't make it to 'vulnerable' group lists, most experience rental stress by paying more than 30% of their gross income on rent which represents a significant percentage of Liverpool residents.

Vulnerable Cohorts

Children and Young People

Young people can be particularly vulnerable to the risk of homelessness and the ongoing impacts it can have on future opportunities. The number of people aged 24 years or younger accessing SHS increased by 37 per cent between 2013/14 and 2016/17, totalling more than 36,000 in 2016/17 and representing nearly half of all SHS clients. On Census night in 2016, young people made up almost 19 per cent of the NSW general population but 24 per cent of the homeless population. Ninety per cent of young people experiencing homelessness have witnessed violence in their home, 60 per cent have been in OOHC, and 50 per cent have a reported mental health issue. Young people leaving OOHC who left school in Year 9 or 10 are 32 per cent more likely to access SHS compared to those who completed Year 12. Children who experience homelessness have increased risk of long-term poverty, homelessness in adulthood, unemployment, and chronic ill-health. They are less likely to finish school than their peers, and more likely to need health support and have involvement with the justice system compared to a young employed person. Early school leavers are two and a half times more likely to be unemployed, earn lower wages, have poorer health, or be involved in criminal activities.

**Liverpool's emerging young population equates to 37.3% of the total residents in our LGA as of 2017.*

Women and children leaving domestic and family violence

Domestic and family violence (DFV) is a leading cause of homelessness among women and children, with one third of people accessing SHS reporting experiencing DFV.¹⁴ Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women are over-represented in this group. Despite only making up 3.3 per cent of the national population, one quarter of people in Australia accessing SHS due to DFV identify as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander.

Older people

There is a growing trend for people to become homeless in later life for the first time, particularly amongst women. Over 15 per cent of people experiencing homelessness are over the age of 55 and this figure is increasing. Between 2013/14 and 2016/17, NSW saw 88 per cent growth in the number of women over the age of 55 years accessing homelessness services. Older people face increasing challenges such as low incomes, retirement with low superannuation, discrimination and health risks. They are especially vulnerable when they have complex circumstances such as mental health issues, financial stress, isolation or past experience of DFV. Women over 45 who experience homelessness are also more likely to remain homeless for a longer period of time.

People with mental health issues

The incidence of mental illness amongst the homeless population is significantly higher than the general population. In 2016/17, one third of people seeking accommodation assistance reported having a current mental health condition. The links between mental health issues, unstable housing and homelessness are significant, with estimates of between 50 and 80 per cent of homeless youth having some experience of mental illness.

People experiencing chronic homelessness or sleeping rough

The number of people who are sleeping rough who access SHS has been steadily increasing – between 2013/14 and 2016/17, this figure increased by 56 per cent to more than 5,500 people across NSW. The trend of people sleeping rough in inner city Sydney has been increasing since 2013. In February 2017, 433 people were sleeping rough in inner city Sydney, compared with 274 in February 2013.²⁴ People who are sleeping rough exhibit high rates of health problems, mental disorder, trauma, cognitive impairment, suicide and other premature deaths.²⁵ Up to 60 per cent have complex physical, mental health and disability support needs. Almost two thirds of people who are sleeping rough who have a mental health issue also have issues with drug or alcohol abuse.²⁶

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people

Aboriginal disadvantage and homelessness are closely linked, with homelessness increasing the social and economic disadvantage faced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people (hereafter Aboriginal). Housing is a key factor in the health and life expectancy gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians, and a key mechanism for continued intergenerational disadvantage. Despite making up less than 3 per cent of the NSW population, Aboriginal people make up almost 8 per cent of the NSW homeless population and almost 30 per cent of SHS users. Across Australia, Indigenous Australians are 14 times more likely to become homeless than other Australians, and their homelessness situations are likely to be more severe. Seven in 10 Aboriginal people who experience homelessness have a parent who experienced homelessness at some point.³¹ It is important to recognise the cultural and spiritual aspects of home for Aboriginal people, as homelessness may not be defined as a lack of accommodation. A person may not have conventional accommodation, however may have a sense of home, a sense of belonging to a place, and recognition and acceptance in that place. A category of spiritual homelessness is also acknowledged, in recognition that a person may experience separation from traditional land, or from family and kinship networks, or a crisis of cultural identity. The NSW Homelessness Strategy will connect to the Aboriginal Housing Strategy, helping to build the system's understanding of cultural and spiritual aspects of homelessness and strengthen service responses.

LGBTIQ population

There is increasing evidence that lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, and queer or questioning (LGBTIQ) people are at higher risk of homelessness compared to the general population and may experience more significant consequences as a result. In 2014, the General Social Survey in Australia identified that more than one third of lesbian/gay people and more than 20 per cent of bisexual people had experienced homelessness, compared with less than 14 per cent of heterosexuals.³³ While the pathways to homelessness for LGBTIQ people are similar to that of other groups, the experience of family rejection and discrimination adds to the complexity of their experiences and can lead to chronic homelessness.

Culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) people

People from CALD backgrounds may have increased vulnerability to homelessness due to additional barriers, such as limited proficiency in English, which can make prevention and early intervention difficult. CALD women and children escaping family violence may experience additional barriers, such as difficulty finding accommodation that enables them to remain connected to family and community, or discrimination when trying to access accommodation, long term housing and other supports to resolve homelessness

Young refugees are six times more likely to become homeless than other young people. The temporary, transitory, and often overcrowded nature of accommodation common to newly arrived migrants and refugees qualifies as many as 33 per cent as homeless at some point after arriving in Australia.

Regional and rural areas

For people living in regional and rural areas, it can be more difficult to escape homelessness because of limited housing options, education, and employment opportunities. Access to disability, health and other specialist services is constrained in some areas, and many services have difficulties recruiting and retaining staff. People needing to travel long distances for medical or court appointments may need to secure overnight accommodation without necessarily having the means to do so.

Access to SHS in regional and rural areas is growing faster than the rate for metropolitan areas of NSW, with 75 per cent growth of regional clients accessing SHS between 2013/14 and 2016/17.³⁸ Two in five people who access SHS are living outside of major cities.³⁹ Across Australia, the rate of people seeking SHS support with their children is higher in regional and rural areas, and service use in remote/very remote areas was 2.6 times higher than in major cities.⁴⁰ Around 40 per cent of people sleeping rough in NSW are outside major cities.